Fertility and the Education of African Parents and Children

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Sub-Saharan Africa exhibits higher fertility and lower education than other world regions. Economic and demographic theory posit that these phenomena are linked, with slow fertility decline connected to slow education growth among both adults and children. Using microdata from 33 African countries, this paper documents the co-evolution of adult education, fertility, and child education in female birth cohorts surrounding the onset of the region's fertility transition. Fertility change displays a robust negative relationship with the educational outcomes of adult women but a more nuanced relationship with the educational outcomes of children. As fertility declines, children's grade attainment rises, but their school enrollment does not. The divergence is partly explained by a split in how women's education relates to fertility and child education. Rising women's education predicts declining fertility and rising children's grade attainment, but it is less systematically linked to enrollment change.